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Viewing cable 07ATHENS559, FM BAKOYANNIS OUTLINES GOALS FOR HER MARCH 22

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07ATHENS559	2007-03-16 12:29	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000559

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SUBJECT: FM BAKOYANNIS OUTLINES GOALS FOR HER MARCH 22
VISIT TO WASHINGTON

REF: ATHENS 550

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHARLES RIES. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In advance of her March 19-23 visit to the U.S., FM Bakoyannis told the Ambassador of her hope that the visit can result in a clear indication by the Secretary of

political support for Greece's entry into the Visa Waiver Program. She also pressed for a U.S. statement supporting Greece's position on a cancelled NATO exercise, arguing that a NATO-wary Greek public needed to see that the U.S., and NATO, would defend Greek interests as well. Ambassador emphasized that he understood the importance of public perceptions of NATO in relation to possible further Greek contributions to NATO operations, including in Afghanistan. Bakoyannis added that she anticipates discussing Balkan issues with the Secretary, including Macedonia's NATO entry and next steps on the Ahtisaari plan on Kosovo. END SUMMARY.

ONE (SMALL) STEP FORWARD ON VWP?

12. (C) Bakoyannis went straight to the point: under political pressure at home for being too pro-American, she needed to point to positive results from her March 22 meetings in Washington. She hoped that, as a result of their meeting, the Secretary would be able to make a statement of political will from the U.S. administration regarding Greek participation in VWP. She hoped the Secretary could emphasize that Greece deserved to enter VWP, and would be both clear and positive -- not something journalists would misunderstand. It also needed to go further than what had been said to other Greek officials. While as an EU member, Bakoyannis anticipated that Greece would eventually become eligible through the EU's efforts, it would be better for U.S.-Greek relations for the decision to be made on a bilateral basis.

13. (C) Ambassador pointed out that the administration wanted Greece to be able to participate in VWP, but that, bureaucratically, the process was not yet ready to for a formal finding that Greece was eligible. Bakoyannis questioned the delay; hadn't the procedure had been under way for a year? The Ambassador reminded her that, formally, it had begun only late last fall. No decision on VWP could be made during Bakoyannis' visit. Bakoyannis mulled a request to see DHS Secretary Chertoff, but emphasized that she was not looking for a final decision on Greek participation. That was a deliverable for PM Karamanlis to achieve. Rather, Bakoyannis wanted a step forward -- underscoring that the U.S. Administration was committed to Greek entry into VWP.

NATO EXERCISE CANCELLATION: NEED U.S. SUPPORT

14. (C) Ambassador underscored the importance of effective Greek participation in NATO, which he had just discussed during consultations in Brussels. He noted that many factors played into decisions regarding NATO exercises in the Aegean; members of the SYG's staff had expressed concern about the unfortunate handling of the Ayios Efstratios decision. Bakoyannis confirmed that she would raise the subject with Secretary Rice. For Greece, NATO acquiescence in Turkish

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efforts to cast doubt on the status of islands in the Aegean would create a "black hole," with half of the Aegean demilitarized. The United States could not remain neutral in this case. For that reason, Bakoyannis hoped for a clear statement from the U.S. during her visit, emphasizing our agreement that Ayios Efstratios was not demilitarized. The Greek public needed, for once, NATO (and U.S.) backing for its position.

15. (C) Ambassador noted that we had already alerted Washington to this request (reftel). We noticed the reaction to the controversy here. We understand that a better opinion of NATO in Greece could help the government find the political capital to support committing further forces to NATO efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Ambassador asked whether Greece is pushing for a U.S. statement that we do not consider Ayios Efstratios demilitarized, or U.S. support for re-staging the cancelled exercise. Bakoyannis (and her Chief of Staff Chalastanis) noted that while either would be positive, they much preferred a U.S. statement backing Greece's position.

MACEDONIA

16. (C) Bakoyannis noted she would also raise Greek concerns regarding "FYROM" with the Secretary. The new government in Skopje seemed to be losing its sense of restraint, undertaking acts (airport naming, statue erection) that needlessly provoked Greek public opinion. While Bakoyannis was trying to keep this issue from affecting internal

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politics in Greece, it was clear that NATO accession was a looming problem. If accession is delayed for a year, that would provide additional time to work on a solution to the name issue. Ambassador pointed out that the U.S. would not agree to postpone Macedonia's accession to 2009 because of the name dispute. The decisions would be taken on the basis of whether the three met NATO criteria.

17. (C) Bakoyannis took the point, adding that there was no need to highlight the name dispute if accession was postponed for substantive implementation reasons. She added that while the GOG believed that the previous government in Skopje had been committed to an eventual agreement, the current government made no secret of its intentions not to compromise. The GOG was ready to do most of the heavy lifting (and the Karamanlis government was prepared to take the political heat), but they needed assurances that it would not be a one-way street. As she put it, "We can move 80 percent of the way, but the Skopjeans have to be prepared to move 20 percent."

KOSOVO

18. (c) Bakoyannis told the Ambassador she had discussed Kosovo with Russian FM Lavrov March 15, admitting that even after the discussion, she did not know how far Russia would go in backing the Serbs. She also planned to talk to Serbian PM Tadic later on March 16 (he is on a private visit to Greece). Both the Russians and the Serbs were concerned about the Ahtisaari's "lack of generosity" to the Kosovo Serbs. Their fears should be addressed. Bakoyannis believed that more time was needed to make progress on 3-4 issues that might make the settlement go down more easily. She did not expect the Serbs would ever explicitly agree, but if the deal was rebalanced somewhat, it might have less impact on instability in the wider region (she was particularly concerned about Bosnia). Ambassador pointed out that NATO forces needed to operate in a permissive environment; it was not an occupying force. For that reason, it was essential to craft a Kosovo transition that was supported by the majority of Kosovars, and to do so now. Prolongation of the status quo was not an option.

COUNTRYMAN